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U.S. Customs and Border Control pre-clearance service now offered at General Aviation terminal



P. 6

US slams Turkey's Twitter ban

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The United States on Friday hit out at Turkey's banning of the online social network Twitter and urged Ankara to restore access to what it called "basic communication tools."

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said an order to prevent Turks from accessing the US firm's micro-blogging site was "contrary to Turkey's own

expressed desire to be a model of democracy."

"The United States supports freedom of expression in Turkey and opposes any action to encroach on the right to free speech," she told reporters.

"We urge the Turkish government to unblock its citizens' access to Twitter and ensure free access to all social media platforms."



Crimea military town splits as Russia moves in

PEREVALNE (AFP) - Surly and dejected, many Ukrainian soldiers at Perevalne base in Crimea deserted their posts Friday, crossing groups of buoyant Russian soldiers moving in -- but 200 were said to be resisting.

Overwhelmed by superior force and on the day Russia formally claimed the Black Sea peninsula as its territory, the biggest base still holding

out against a creeping month-long invasion was slowly giving up.

"Don't worry mum, I'm picking up my things and then I'm coming home," one soldier in a camouflage uniform was heard saying on the phone as Russian troops raised their flag at the main entrance to the base.

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'Stop doing evil,' pope tells mafia

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OAS bars press for session on Venezuela

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The Organization of American States decided Friday to close to the press a session at which a prominent Venezuelan opposition lawmaker was expected to speak to the regional body. The OAS's permanent council voted 22 to 11 in favor of barring the press, with member abstaining.

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Malaysia asks US for undersea surveillance gear in jet

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Malaysia on Friday asked the United States to provide undersea surveillance technology to help in the search for the wreckage of a missing airliner, Pentagon officials said.

The request came as a near two-week search failed to find any debris from the Boeing 777 that disappeared off the radar after taking off from Kuala Lumpur on March 8.

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L to R: James Grimes, Peter Steinmetz, Dylan DeFrancisci, PM Mike Eman, Hormazd Kanga, Claudio Stamper, Minister Otmar Oduber and Minister Mike de Meza

ORANJESTAD -- Aruba's Reina Beatrix International Airport has the distinction of being the only Caribbean country offering U.S. Customs and Border Control (CBP) pre-clearance for travelers to the U.S. Immigration services were first offered here in 1989, followed by a full customs clearance station in 1994.

On the southern side of the airport's tarmac is General Aviation, which receives and processes private flights in and out of Aruba. In 2008, plans were laid to establish another pre-clearance station for the terminal, to accommodate approximately 200 private flights from the U.S. deploying the facility annually.

Prime Minister Mike Eman was very pleased to welcome CBP Director from Washington D.C., Dylan De-

Francisci, who had previously served six years as Aruba's CBP Port Director, for the ribbon cutting of a new station within the General Aviation terminal on Thursday afternoon, March 20. The current CBP Director Aruba, James Grimes, also attended with Ottawa CBP Chief Ellyna Larsen, presently Acting Director for the Caribbean Region.

Director DeFrancisci gave a brief history of the CBP, which was established in 2003 as a response to the 9/11 attack. It is now the largest law enforcement agency within the Department of Homeland Security, by combining four important branches of immigration, customs and border patrol.

Of the 329 ports of entry in the U.S. and overseas under their authority, 16 are

pre-clearance stations such as exist on Aruba. The island ranks with Canada, Ireland, The Bahamas, and Bermuda, with the newest CBP station in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The first such pre-clearance station was established in Toronto, Canada in 1952. He expressed that pre-clearance is an important part of the CBP border strategy, and they anticipated many more such facilities to come.

"While our primary mission is to prevent terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering the U.S.," explained Director DeFrancisci, "we are also responsible for facilitating legitimate trade and travel, apprehending individuals attempting to enter illegally or wanted on charges, into the U.S., preventing the entry of illegal drugs or other contraband, safeguarding

U.S. agriculture from harmful pests and diseases, and protecting American businesses from intellectual property theft."

Representing the U.S. Consul for the Dutch Caribbean was Management Officer Hormazd J. Kanga from their headquarters in Curacao. Island dignitaries joining the Prime Minister for the opening of the facility were the Minister of Economic Affairs, Communications, Energy and Environment, Mike de Meza and Minister of Tourism, Transport, and Primary Sector Otmar Oduber, who came to the podium to say a few words. Also present was the Head of the Aruba Department of Foreign Affairs, Andy Lee, who was involved in the negotiations for establishing the CBP station.

Welcoming them was the CEO of the Aruba Airport Authority (AAA) Peter Steinmetz, and the Director of General Aviation, Claudio Stamper. Mr. Steinmetz described the CBP Aruba station purpose as not only improving U.S. security, but also an improved travel experience for those departing from Aruba, saving them time and further travel stress upon arriving home. It is also beneficial to airlines, as the result is shorter turn around times at domestic gates.

"The bonds of friendship between the United States and Aruba are very strong," Mr. Kanga told the gathering. "Thousands of American citizens visit Aruba each year, they enjoy the warm weather and also the warm welcome they receive from the people of Aruba. Thousands of Arubans

visit the U.S. as well...in addition to our strong people ties, we share a commitment to combating narcotics trafficking, and we have partnerships in all areas of law enforcement." He also extended congratulations to Prime Minister Eman for his commitment to the use of renewable energy and the environment, and his vision and leadership for the direction in which he is taking Aruba regarding these important issues.

This was a landmark moment for Aruba and the CPB, which Prime Minister Eman described as "a proud day and important milestone for our national airport...we see this in the context of a facility that will accommodate the travelers to the U.S., now also for private flights. But we should also see it in a broader and deeper context.

When nations were first forming, one of the first things they did were to consolidate and create borders, to guarantee their territorial integrity and mark their jurisdiction. It is based upon trust and confidence when we see countries begin to eliminate the borders. When you reach that point, it means that you share values and vision with the kind of society you would like to create, legally and socially. Naturally, it is difficult for the U.S. and Aruba to wholly eliminate borders, as we are not neighboring countries, we have a vast ocean in between, but the best we can do, is what we are doing today, and what we did 27 years ago; we are expressing our mutual sense of trust and confidence between two nations."

By Rosalie Klein

Condolences on the tragic passing of Ashok Ramchandani



ORANJESTAD -- It is with great sadness that management and staff of THE MORNING NEWS offers sincere condolences to the family of Ashok Ramchandani, who was lost to the Aruban community during a car accident yesterday morning.

Mr. Ramchandani was an important member of the island community and had a strong impact in its commerce. He was a major shareholder in such important projects as Palm Beach Plaza, Pricesmart, and brought Caribbean Cinemas to the Aruba. He had recently opened an Indian specialty store in Oranjestad, among many other business interests.

Mr. Ramchandani was highly influential among his Indian compatriots, and readily offered his assistance to many charitable causes. Along with his friends and family, THE MORNING NEWS was very saddened to learn of his untimely demise.

April 1st: Deadline for submission of 2014 Personnel Registry

ORANJESTAD -- The Department of Labor has recently issued a special bulletin to remind all employers to submit the 2013-2014 Personnel Registry by April 1st, 2014. This is in keeping with the labor law, Ordinance 30, paragraph 2. This law stipulates that all employers have an obligation to submit the registry of all personnel in their employ.

The registry consists of three parts: actual personnel as of December 31, 2013, their personnel needs for 2014 (in accordance with the Manpower Planning), and the need for personnel for specific projects. Together with the forms, they are to add explanations of the definition of the terminology used for the 2013-2014 registry.

Where to get the registry forms 2013 – 2014?

These can be downloaded via the website www.overheid.aw or www.gobierno.aw. Or, one

can visit the DAO offices and collect the forms in person on the L.G. Smith Blvd. 134 or at their offices in San Nicolaas or by sending an email to arbeidsmarktonderzoek@hotmail.com and request the form and pick it up with a fill out manual at the main office on LG Smith Blvd 134 or their branch in San Nicolas.

Employers with more than one outlet must fill out a form for all employees and indicate which employees circulate between outlets. This year DAO is requesting that the forms be submitted digitally in the Excel spreadsheet format. The information may be scanned and sent via email to DAO.

The Personnel Registry must be submitted before the deadline date of April 1st, 2014 to the offices of DAO. For more information contact telephones 583-7720 extension 279, or 284, or 223. Office hours are from 8:00 to 12 and from 1:00 to 4:00pm.

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Mary Anderson honored at the Tamarijn



Recently Mary Anderson was honored at the Tamarijn. The ceremony was conducted by Jonathan Boekhoudt of Aruba Tourism Authority in the presence of her lifelong friends made in Aruba.

Mary was granted the Goodwill Ambassador certificate in commemoration of her 20 consecutive visits to our island. Mary and company just celebrated St. Patrick's Day followed by

Aruba's Flag & Anthem Day at the Tamarijn.
Pictured are Mary with

friends and Mr. Bradley Versprey from the Tamarijn.

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Cas Animal Cont'd

Homeless island puppies find happy homes in the U.S. thanks to dog loving tourists



Judith Collins takes Vida to a new home in the U.S.

ORANJESTAD -- Our continuing coverage of Cas Animal Foundation of Aruba, which is dedicated to rescuing abandoned and abused dogs off island streets, ideally to be placed in a good home, has had many encouraging events to report over the last few months. No matter how badly injured or weaken by diseased, Cas Animal founder, Kirsten Arndt, has discovered hundreds of times over that with proper medical care, frightened, injured and abused dogs and puppies can be rehabilitated to be a wonderful friend to a loving person. Often, their afflictions are only superficial, but rendering them unattractive, which is no reason, in Kirsten's opinion, to deprive them of a happy life and the chance to be a loyal, loving companion.

The foundation's mission is to build Aruba's first no-kill animal shelter, but the primary goal aside from providing a permanent shelter

for the unwanted, is to place the rescued dogs in loving homes. For the last six months Cas Animal has been experiencing exceptional success along this lines. A recent partnering with a frequent visitor, Pennsylvanian resident and dog champion, Brandy Hawk has provided a steady stream of prospective "parents."

Brandy personally adopted two adult dogs and a puppy, which got a last minute reprieve from being put down by local animal control services. She staunch supporter of Aruba establishing a no-kill dog shelter, and is actively recruiting all her friends and other like-minded individuals to join her in adopting island dogs and supporting the project. She has had remarkable positive reception and discovered many Aruba and dog lovers like herself, who wish to participate.

Unfortunately, Brandy cannot travel down to Aruba

every time a home has been found for an island dog, so a call goes out to island visitors who are returning home to put a dog on their ticket, and escort them to her waiting arms. Such a lucky canine was Vida, a slightly older dog who had to remain in Aruba for treatment before being certified healthy enough to be admitted to the U.S.

Brandy was smitten with Vida, managing to rescue her from being put down as a su-

perfluous animal, and has been eagerly awaiting her arrival. Judith Collins of Philadelphia, a veteran visitor to Aruba, was more than happy to accommodate, adding Vida to her ticket for the trip home. All expenses for such favors, including travel carriers, are taken care of by the foundation or the new owners of the dog.

Judith is a veterinary assistant who years ago was part of a massive effort by

ARF, Animal Relief Foundation Aruba, which also seeks to connect homeless island dogs with loving homes in the U.S. She came with a team of veterinarians who conducted a marathon five-day program of free spaying and neutering, operating on hundreds of animals, to reduce the island's unwanted dog population. Cas Animal is making it their mission to again host such an event.

Continued on pg 5

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Annual report of Aruba Advisory Board presented to Governor


ORANJESTAD – Recently, Chairman of the Aruba Advisory Board, Mr. Frits Goedgedrag presented Governor Fredis Refunjol with the 2013 annual report which was just published.

Besides containing a resume of all the work done by the Advisory Board, the report also has the Board's vision on Aruba's public finances.

Interested persons can also read the report on the Advisory Board's website www.rva.aw. Photo shows Governor Refunjol accepting the report from Mr. Goedgedrag.

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Cas Animal Cont'd

Cont. from pg 4

If you have taken on temporary care of an Aruba dog you have met during your vacation, it is easy to take them back with you. Cas Animal has assisted many in this process. Call Kirsten at 742-8732 and she will help you step by step to acquire the papers and a carrier needed to take one home. As this story

demonstrates, this is done regularly and many happy owners find great pleasure in being reminded every day of Aruba by their loving new companion.

If you are willing to transport a dog back to the U.S. or Europe to a happy new home, please also contact the foundation, as this is a service of

which it is always in need. Air Tran does not take dogs unless they are "comfort dogs," but all other airlines are quite accommodating.

The medical and feeding costs of all the rescued animals under foundation care is never ending.

Presently, there are about 50, and there are new addi-

tions almost weekly. As many as possible are processed for adoption, but there will always be those too injured or disable, at which most balk at the responsibility. These are assured of the proper care and love within the foundation's shelter.

Those wishing to support Kirsten's work with dona-

tions can do so in the form of payment to the Cas Animal Foundation account at the Contreras Veterinary Clinics, call; 587-0917.

Donations can also be made directly to the foundation's account: Cas Animal Foundation, CMB Bank account # 25762110.

Crimea military town splits as Russia moves in

Cont. from pg 1

In another part of the sprawling facility, dozens of young soldiers were seen moving in with crates and sleeping mats as the Ukrainians brought out their own cases.

One Ukrainian soldier said about 20 percent of the estimated 1,000 troops of the base were staying at their posts, 40 percent had pledged allegiance to the new pro-Moscow government and 40 percent had returned to Ukraine's mainland.

"I'm one of the ones staying. I swore an oath," said the young soldier, who declined to be named, as he embraced his girlfriend and young daughter who came to visit

him.

The situation at Perevalne illustrated the confusion at many bases in Crimea, where even Ukrainian soldiers under siege move around freely and there are often local agreements between Russian and Ukrainian troops.

One middle-aged woman at a bus stop surrounded by housing blocks in the dilapidated town next to the base said her son was also still holding out.

"I'm for a free and united Ukraine!" said the woman, who also preferred to remain anonymous, as around 100 Russian troops were seen patrolling the area.

'Stop doing evil,' pope tells mafia

ROME (AFP) - Pope Francis called on the mafia to "stop doing evil" as he met relatives of their victims on Friday to demonstrate the Catholic Church's opposition to organised crime.

Over a thousand people attended prayers with the pope at a church near the Vatican, where a list of 843 names of victims of mafia violence were read out -- including butchered toddlers and renowned anti-mafia Judge Giovanni Falcone, blown up in his car in 1992.

The meeting was an attempt to draw a line under the Church's historic ties with dons claiming to be God-fearing Catholics.

"Men and women of the mafia... change your way of life. Stop doing evil, convert," the pontiff said.

"There is still time to avoid ending up in hell, which is where you are going if you continue down this path," Francis warned the country's mafiosi.

He told Italy's mobsters to relinquish their "blood-stained money" which "cannot be taken into paradise."

Francis "wants to make it known that the gospel and the mafia, the gospel and corruption, the gospel and illegality, cannot go hand in hand," father Marcello Cozzi, deputy president of the anti-mafia Libera association, told AFP ahead of the ceremony.

Numerous priests fight against the Cosa Nostra in Sicily, the 'Ndrangheta in Calabria and the Camorra in Naples -- sometimes paying for their bravery with their lives -- but the Italian Church also has a darker side.

Mafia dons have histori-

cally attended mass, often receiving lavish funerals and presenting themselves as good Catholic benefactors, stepping in to serve local residents where the state has failed to help. They also claim to live by a "code of honour".

Cozzi said the murder of a three-year-old this week in mafia retaliation was the latest proof that such a code did not exist, and has never done so.

"In the list of victims' names there are at least 80 minors. A mafia which does not kill children does not exist, they have always killed children," he said.

- An open wound -

The Church has long been marred by reports of financial corruption, with the Vatican Bank embroiled in claims of mafia money-laundering.

It was the main shareholder of the Banco Ambrosiano, which collapsed in 1982 amid accusations of mafia association. Its chairman Roberto Calvi -- dubbed "God's Banker" -- was found hanging from a London bridge that year in a suspected murder by mobsters.

Francis has moved fast since his election last year to clean up the Vatican's scandal-plagued finances, setting up a commission tasked with reform and inviting in external auditors. Suspect accounts have been closed or flagged up for deeper inspection.

The dirty accounts "are an open wound", and if the Church is serious about tackling organised crime, full transparency is the first step, Cozzi said.

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Malaysia asks US for undersea surveillance gear in jet

Cont. from pg 1

In a phone call to Pentagon chief Chuck Hagel, Malaysia's defense minister and acting transport minister Hishammuddin Hussein "requested that the US consider providing some undersea surveillance equipment," Pentagon spokesman Rear Admiral John Kirby said. Hagel assured his counterpart that he would "assess the availability and utility of military undersea technology for such a task and provide him an update in the very near future," Kirby said in a statement.

Officials did not say precisely what equipment the Pentagon might provide but the US military has invested heavily in robotic technology designed for undersea surveillance against enemy submarines or torpedoes.

The Malaysian minister thanked Hagel for the US Navy's assistance in the search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which disappeared with 239 passengers and crew in an unprecedented aviation mystery.

Two US Navy maritime surveillance planes, a P-3 Orion and P-8 Poseidon, have been taking part in the search. The P-8 has flown with Australian aircraft in a search of the southern Indian Ocean, while the P-3 --- which had been combed an area in the Bay of Bengal -- is due to join the search in the southern zone, officials said.

OAS bars press for session on Venezuela

Cont. from p 1

"The objective of this meeting is not to turn itself into a circus for an outside audience as some representatives have shown they want to do," Brazil's ambassador said, explaining his country's vote in favor of closing the session.

Among the countries voting with Brazil to keep out the press were Nicaragua, Uruguay, El Salvador, Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia and all but one of the Caribbean countries. Barbados abstained.

Panama was among the members voting against barring the press.

"I don't see why there has to be secrecy," said that country's Ambassador Arturo Valarino.

Panama had accredited Venezuelan lawmaker Maria Corina Machado to its dele-

gation so she could speak about the situation in Venezuela where 31 people have been killed anti-government protests since February 4.

Voting with Panama against closing the OAS session were the United States, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras.

Machado is a proponent, along with jailed opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, of an opposition strategy called "the exit" which seeks to force President Nicolas Maduro's resignation under pressure of street protests.

The government is threatening to strip her of her parliamentary immunity and charge her with murder over the street protests.



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Kenya legalises polygamy without wife's consent

NAIROBI (AFP) - Kenya's parliament has passed a bill allowing men to marry as many women as they want, prompting a furious backlash from female lawmakers who stormed out, reports said Friday.

The bill, which amended existing marriage legislation, was passed late on Thursday to formalise customary law about marrying more than one person.

The proposed bill had ini-

tially given a wife the right to veto the husband's choice, but male members of parliament overcame party divisions to push through a text that dropped this clause.

"When you marry an African woman, she must know the second one is on the way, and a third wife... this is Africa," MP Junet Mohammed told the house, according to Nairobi's Capital FM.

As in many parts of Africa,

polygamy is common among traditional communities in Kenya, as well as among the country's Muslim community, which accounts for up to a fifth of the population.

"Any time a man comes home with a woman, that would be assumed to be a second or third wife," said Samuel Chepkong'a, chairman of the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee, the Daily Nation newspaper reported.

"Under customary law,

women or wives you have married do not need to be told when you're coming home with a second or third wife. Any lady you bring home is your wife," he added.

Female MPs stormed out of the late-night session in fury after a heated debate.

"We know that men are afraid of women's tongues more than anything else," female legislator Soipan Tuya told fellow MPs, according to Capital FM.

"But at the end of the day, if you are the man of the house, and you choose to bring on another party -- and they may be two or three -- I think it behoves you to be man enough to agree that your wife and family should know," she added.

Parliamentary majority leader Aden Duale, a Muslim, said that men marrying more than one woman was part of the Islamic faith, but also highlighted Biblical stories to justify Christians not asking their wife before taking another.

Women are not allowed to marry more than one man in Kenya.

The bill must now pass before the president to be signed before becoming law.

AFP reporter, family among nine killed in Kabul hotel attack

KABUL (AFP) - In this picture taken on yesterday, Sardar Ahmad, 40, a Kabul based staff reporter at the Agence France-Presse (AFP) news agency poses for a photo at the AFP office in Kabul hours before he, his wife and two of his three children were gunned down when four teenage gunmen attacked Kabul's Serena hotel. An AFP staff photographer identified the four bodies at a city hospital and said the family's youngest son was undergoing emergency treatment after being badly wounded in the attack. Four teenage gunmen with pistols hidden in their socks managed to penetrate several layers of security at the Serena hotel killing at least nine civilians.



Uruguay seeks US release of jailed Cubans

MONTEVIDEO (AFP) - Uruguay's President Jose Mujica said Friday he has asked Washington to release Cuban prisoners held in the United States in return for his country taking Guantanamo detainees.

Mujica said his government had agreed to receive detainees from the US military prison as a human rights matter.

But on Friday the Uruguayan leader said negotiations for the transfer were "far from concluded" -- and he had a request of his own.

"We are not doing this for money or for material things," he said. "But we have no qualms in asking the North American government to please do what is possible to release those two or three Cuban prisoners who have been there for many years, because that is also shameful," Mujica said.

The Uruguayan leader did not name the Cuban prisoners but he appeared to be referring to three Cubans convicted in a 1998 spy case in Florida that has been a major thorn in US relations with Havana.

Two of the original "Cuban Five" have been released after serving out their sentences, one last month and the other in 2011.

The men were part of a spy ring that infiltrated the Key West Naval Air Station and Cuban exile groups in Miami.

Mujica, a former leftist guerrilla, said the negotiations over the Guantanamo detainees depended on "various decisions beyond our reach."

He said the detainees would be treated as "free men" in Uruguay and a two year prohibition against their leaving the country would be "a voluntary gesture by them to get out of this shameful situation, and not something we would impose."

Transfers out of Guantanamo have increased recently, the latest taking place this month when an Algerian was repatriated after spending 12 years at the prison without a trial.

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Britain prosecutes first female genital mutilation case



LONDON (AFP) - A London doctor and another man have become the first people to be charged in Britain over female genital mutilation, state prosecutors announced on Friday.

Dr. Dhanuson Dharmasena, 31, is accused of re-performing an FGM procedure on a woman who gave birth at his hospital in November 2012 following damage caused by labour.

Another man, Hasan Mohamed, 40, is accused of intentionally encouraging an offence of FGM, and of aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring Dharmasena to

commit the offence.

It was not immediately clear what Mohamed's relationship to the victim was, but he is not a healthcare professional.

Some 100 to 140 million girls and women globally are thought to have undergone FGM, which ranges from removal of the clitoris to more widespread mutilation, and can lead to infection and long-term severe pain.

There have been increasing calls on police and the government to act, and last month ministers introduced a new requirement on British hospitals to keep a record of

Cholesterol drug may help multiple sclerosis sufferers: report

PARIS (AFP) - A cheap drug used to control blood cholesterol may also slow progression of later-stage multiple sclerosis (MS), according to

a study.

Scientists found some evidence to suggest that simvastatin may help fight MS a decade ago, but further

small-scale trials did not back up the findings.

Now, a larger study says there are encouraging signs that the cholesterol-reducing drug can slow the development of MS when the disease reaches a chronic, crippling phase.

MS is a progressive disease of the brain and central nervous system in which the immune system attacks a fatty insulative sheath around nerve fibres.

The symptoms range from numbness and tingling to muscle weakness and spasms, cramps, nausea, depression and memory loss.

About 10 to 15 years after diagnosis, the disease usually becomes chronic and patients start to suffer more severe symptoms. The brain loses tissue, shrinking at a rate of about 0.6 percent of its volume per year.

Patients who took simvastatin also reported a similar number of side effects as those who were given the harmless placebo pill.

Simvastatin, a type of statin anti-cholesterol treatment, is a standard, low-cost drug designed to impede the buildup of fatty deposits in the blood vessels -- a major risk for cardiovascular health.

Cuba gives doctors big pay raise -- to \$64 a month



HAVANA (AFP) - Cuba's doctors got a big pay raise Friday -- to 64 dollars a month, the official Communist Party newspaper Granma said. The hike in pay from \$25 a month was to reward health professionals for being the country's top source of hard currency export earnings. President Raul Castro last month rejected pay increases for other state workers, but said they were justified for doctors, dentists and nurses "because at the moment the country's main income is due to the work of thousands of doctors overseas." Some 50,000 Cuban doctors and health specialists work in 66 countries. They bring in \$8.2 billion a year into state coffers. The value of Cuban exports, by comparison, totals only \$5 billion a year. Cuban doctors earn far more serving overseas than they do at home, but the lion's share of their salaries goes to the government.



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The Muppets return for new escapade

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - While animated wizardry makes basically anything possible for filmmakers these days, there is something comforting about the Muppets returning in all their floppy, fuzzy puppetness.

Kermit, Miss Piggy and the rest of the gang are back to entertain a new generation of fans -- as well as the older ones -- in "Muppets Most Wanted," released in the United States on Friday.

The new movie comes three years after Disney revived the franchise with "The Muppets," which made \$158 million and won a best song Oscar for "Man or Muppet."

The 2011 film was such a hit that Disney, which in 2004 bought the children's TV troupe created by Jim Henson, agreed to make a sequel with the same director, James Bobin.

The Briton and screenwriter Nicholas Stoller may be the same, but a new human cast this time includes British comic Ricky Gervais, and Americans Tina Fey and Ty Burrell.

"Muppets Most Wanted" opens where the last film left off, with Kermit and co flushed from their triumphant return to showbusiness.

Their hintingly-named manager Dominic Badguy



(Gervais) suggests a world tour, an idea seized on by all of them -- except Kermit -- little suspecting that Badguy is in reality working with Constantine, an evil Kermit double.

The film remains faithful to the Muppet traditions: plenty of fun, lots of musical numbers and featuring celebrity guest stars -- in this case Celine Dion, making her film debut as Miss Piggy's fairy godmother.

Burrell, star of award-winning TV series "Modern Family," plays Jean-Pierre Napoleon, a heavily-accented French policeman who teams up with Sam the Eagle, patriotic and protective of the Muppets, to hunt for Constantine.

To speak English like a Frenchman, the actor worked with an accent coach.

The other challenge was working with puppets -- and legendary ones at that.

"It's a little disconcerting at first to kind of see behind the curtains so to speak, then you get used to it very quickly," said Burrell, adding that he was astonished at how the puppeteers work.

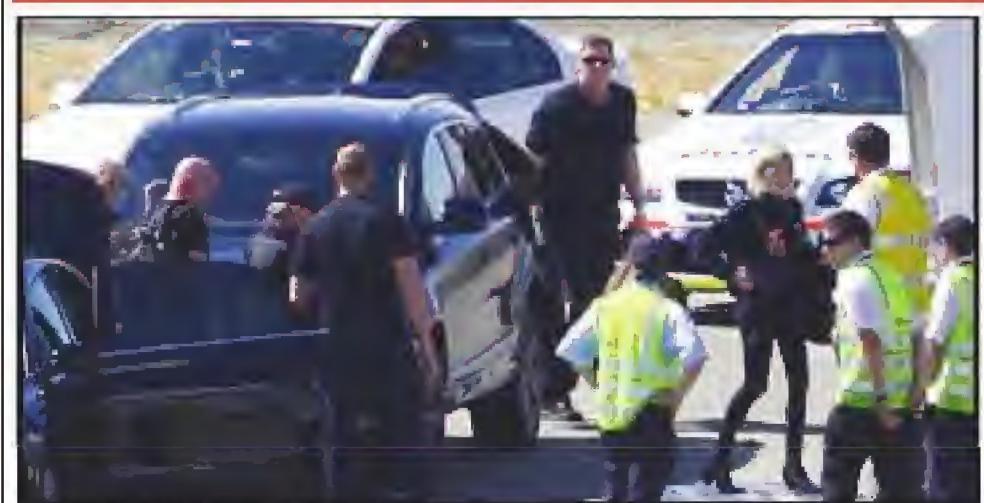
Burrell joked that he ended up treating the Muppets like real people.

Burrell acknowledged that he is a life-long Muppet fan, having watched the original TV "Muppet Show" as a child.

"I remember really distinctly the opening sequence and sitting with my dad and having (old men puppet characters) Statler and Waldorf make some comments, and my dad just laughing hysterically," he said.

"Those are the kind of memories that stick with you. When your dad or somebody you look up to finds something funny, you really take note of that, you really pay attention to it."

Jagger comforted by daughters in Los Angeles



LOS ANGELES (AFP) - Mick Jagger is being comforted by his daughters in Los Angeles after postponing a Rolling Stones tour following his girlfriend's suicide in New York, a spokesman said Thursday. The grieving Stones frontman flew from Australia to California, where one of his daughters lives and two others are staying following L'Wren Scott's shock death. It remains unclear when the funeral will be held for the former model turned fashion designer, who was found hanged in her luxury apartment on Monday. His daughter Karis lives in Los Angeles, while Elizabeth and Georgia May are also staying here, according to media reports. The Stones postponed their tour of Australia and New Zealand.

New Star Wars to start filming in Britain in May



LONDON (AFP) - The first new Star Wars movie for a decade will start filming in Britain in May, it was revealed Wednesday, and the loveable droid R2-D2 is among the cast. Filming will begin at Pinewood Studios outside London, where pre-production has been under way for several months. The movie, currently known only as "Star Wars: Episode VII", is being directed by JJ Abrams, known for the cult TV series "Lost" and the latest "Star Trek" movies. A statement on the official Star Wars website said the new film would feature three "new young leads" alongside "some very familiar faces". That will fuel speculation that the stars of the original trilogy -- Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford and Carrie Fisher -- will appear in Episode VII.

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Curbing pesticides will slash wheat yields: study



PARIS (AFP) - France's winter wheat harvest could shrink by over a tenth if farmers meet targets to halve pesticide use, said a study highlighting the challenge of feeding Earth's growing population.

The estimates come from field trials where scientists compared yields to cuts in pesticide use.

Extrapolated for the country as a whole, halving pesticide use could mean a decline in winter wheat production of two to three million tonnes per year, the researchers said.

This amounts to a reduction of five to 13 percent of national production of winter wheat, and 15 percent of French wheat exports.

Halving pesticide use "may not be profitable for farmers", the team wrote in the *Nature* journal *Scientific Reports*.

With projections of an extra two billion mouths to feed by 2050 and a shortage of new farmland, increasing crop yield per hectare has never been as urgent.

Pesticides played a crucial role in doubling the average yield of cereal crops world-

wide from 1960 to 1990, but their impact on human health and biodiversity have made them controversial.

European farmers are encouraged to limit pesticide use, and French environmental policy targets a 50-percent reduction by 2018. Now researchers have calculated what the impact of such a policy is likely to be. They used data from 176 experimental farming plots from four sites in France that compared yields for wheat grown with pesticides, with less pesticides, or with none.

Halving pesticide use would decrease input costs for winter wheat by about 66 euros per hectare in France, said the team.

This means a yield loss of 0.4 tonnes per hectare (80 euros lost per hectare) would be only partly compensated, at current wheat prices of more than 200 euros (\$280) per tonne.

There might be gains in other areas, said the team, by reducing the cost, for example, of purifying pesticide-polluted water -- estimated at between four and 15 billion euros in France in 2011.

Humans can detect one trillion smells: study



WASHINGTON (AFP) - The human nose can distinguish at least one trillion different odors, millions more than previously estimated, US researchers said.

For decades, scientists accepted that humans could detect only 10,000 scents, putting the sense of smell well below the capabilities of sight and hearing.

Researchers have estimated that the human eye and its mere three receptors can distinguish several million colors and that the ear can discriminate 340,000 sounds.

"For smell, nobody ever took the time to test," researcher Vosshall said.

They said our ancestors relied more on the sense of smell, but that refrigeration and the development of personal hygiene have limited odors in the modern world.

"This could explain our attitude that smell is unimportant, compared to hearing and vision," Keller said.

He added that upright posture, which raised humans' noses far from the ground where odors often emanate, may also have contributed.

The sense of smell is closely linked to human behavior and the researchers stressed that studying it could shed light on how the human brain processes complex information.

Google toughens security with Gmail encryption



WASHINGTON (AFP) - Google said its popular Gmail service would use encryption to thwart snooping, in the latest move by the tech sector reassuring customers following revelations about US surveillance programs.

"Your email is important to you, and making sure it stays safe and always available is important to us," Gmail engineering security chief Nicolas Lidzborski said in a blog post.

Google has already begun scrambling most of the traffic at its websites as technology firms grapple with moves by US intelligence agencies to spy on what people are doing and sharing online.

And similar moves have been announced by Yahoo, Microsoft and Facebook to

use encryption that limits the ability of a third party to read messages or emails.

US tech firms have been ramping up encryption since last year's explosive revelations about the vast surveillance capabilities of the National Security Agency and other intelligence services, based on leaked documents.

Some reports say the NSA had been able to access the data centers of Google and other Web firms.

Experts say encryption generally prevents outsiders from intercepting a person's messages or documents, but that a persistent effort can gain access through malware or other methods that trick a person into revealing passwords.



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Credit Suisse to pay \$885 mn over US mortgage bonds

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Swiss bank Credit Suisse agreed Friday to pay \$885 million to settle US charges it sold shoddy mortgage bonds to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac ahead of the financial crisis.

Credit Suisse will pay about \$651 million to Fannie and \$234 million to Freddie, said the Federal Housing Finance Agency, the conservator of the two companies rescued by government during the 2008 financial crisis.

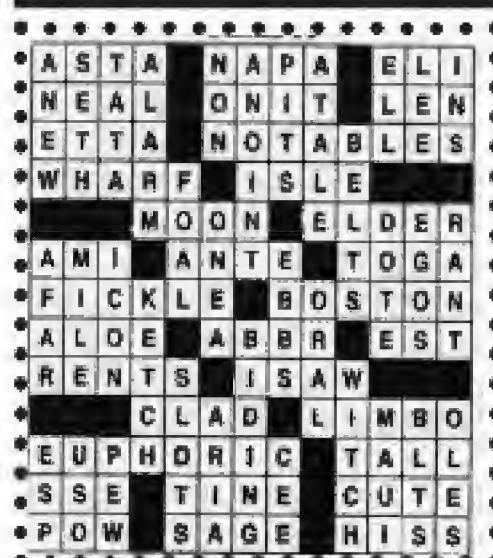
The FHFA said the settlement resolves all of its claims in two lawsuits against Credit Suisse.

The claims alleged that Credit Suisse misrepresented the quality of billions of dollars of mortgage-backed securities it sold to Freddie and Fannie during 2005-2007.

Credit Suisse agreed to the settlement while still "vigorously" denying the allegations in both cases.

The agency said the bank's documentation for the securities contained misstatements and omissions of material facts concerning the quality of the underlying mortgage loans, the creditworthiness of

YESTERDAY'S Crossword Answer



Current as of: 03/21/2014		Currency Code	Buying rate banknotes	Buying Cheques	Selling Rate
U.S.A.	USD	1.77	1.78	1.80	
Dutch Antilles	ANG	98.00	100.00	100.20	
Canada	CAD	1.77	1.79	1.81	
Britain	GBP	2.80	2.85	2.98	
Switzerland	CHF	191.71	192.43	202.88	
Netherlands	EUR	230.59	232.69	247.90	
Sweden	SEK	25.91	26.63	28.26	
Denmark	DKK	30.23	30.95	33.44	
Norway	NOK	30.67	31.39	39.87	
Japan	JPY	214.88	216.84	175.73	
(per 10,000)					
All rates for amounts up to AWG 100,00 per item.					

Media General to buy LIN in \$2.6 bn US broadcast deal

WASHINGTON (AFP) - US broadcaster Media General said Friday it will buy LIN Media in a \$2.6 billion deal that creates the nation's second-largest television broadcasting company and a digital media powerhouse.

The merged company will own and operate or service 74 television stations across 46 markets, and serve some 26.5 million households, or 23 percent of the US market, Media General said in a statement.

The stock-and-cash merger pays about LIN \$27.82 per share, a 28 percent premium for the multimedia company.

Media General will pay \$763 million in cash and the equivalent of \$858 million in shares, based on its closing share price on Thursday.

In addition, Media General will assume LIN's debt of \$968 million, bringing the total value of the transaction to \$2.6 billion.

Media General, partly owned by tycoon Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway,

away, will form a new holding company that will be named Media General.

"Combining Media General and LIN Media will create the second-largest pure-play TV broadcasting company in the United States, a financially strong organization that will have opportunities for profitable growth greater than either company could achieve on its own," Media General chairman J. Stewart Bryan said in the statement.

"The prospects for digital media growth are particularly exciting."

In addition to the websites associated with each TV station, the new Media General will have a digital media portfolio that includes LIN Digital, LIN Mobile, Dedicated Media, HYFN, Nami Media and Federated Media.

LIN will own about 36 percent of the new company, which will remain headquartered in Richmond, Virginia. General Media noted that some of the TV stations may

have to swapped or sold to address regulatory issues.

The deal is subject to shareholders and regulatory approval. The companies expect the transaction to close in early 2015.

Investors liked the deal. Shares in Media General surged 4.7 percent to \$18.15 and LIN surged 22.1 percent to \$26.23.

The new company will rank second to Tribune Company, which became the largest US commercial TV station owner in 2013 after buying Local TV for \$2.7 billion in cash.

Media General had been in the newspaper business for more than 160 years when it started selling off newspapers in 2012 as the industry struggled in the face of digital competition.

It sold 63 newspapers to Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway for \$142 million in cash, saying it would use the proceeds to pay down debt. Berkshire holds a stake in Media General.

Oil market rallies on Ukraine tensions before weekend

LONDON (AFP) - Global oil prices rose Friday on tensions in Ukraine, but gains were tempered by the strong dollar as the Federal Reserve hinted at an interest rate rise early next year.

New York's main contract, West Texas Intermediate

(WTI) for delivery in April delivery, jumped \$1.23 to \$100.13 a barrel.

Brent North Sea crude for May gained \$1.06 to \$107.51 per barrel, from Thursday's closing level.

"The oil market is being driven higher by increased fears of a disruption in crude supplies following the expansion of US sanctions against Russia," said analysts at London-based brokerage PVM.

Traders are closely monitoring events in eastern Europe after Russia absorbed the Crimean peninsula following a controversial referendum slammed as illegal by the West.

US President Barack Obama announced Thursday expanded sanctions against Russian officials, and minutes later the Kremlin struck back with travel bans against US officials and lawmakers, including the leaders of both chambers of Congress.

Russia provides about a quarter of Europe's natural

gas supplies, with a significant portion of that flowing through pipelines that cross Ukraine.

Traders fear that an escalation of the crisis would disrupt those supplies.

Analysts also noted that the new US sanctions targeted Russian billionaire Gennady Timchenko, a co-founder of Gunvor, a leading independent commodity trading company involved in the oil and energy markets.

New York oil prices had slid below \$100 a barrel on Thursday as the dollar strengthened.

The dollar surged on Wednesday after Janet Yellen said a rate rise could come "around six months" after the Fed's stimulus programme ends.

Economists took that to mean an increase in borrowing costs in the first half of 2015, against previous forecasts of a hike in the latter part of the year.

COMICS

PICKLES



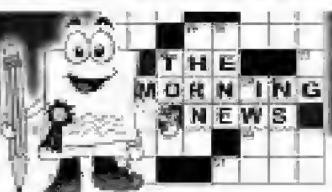
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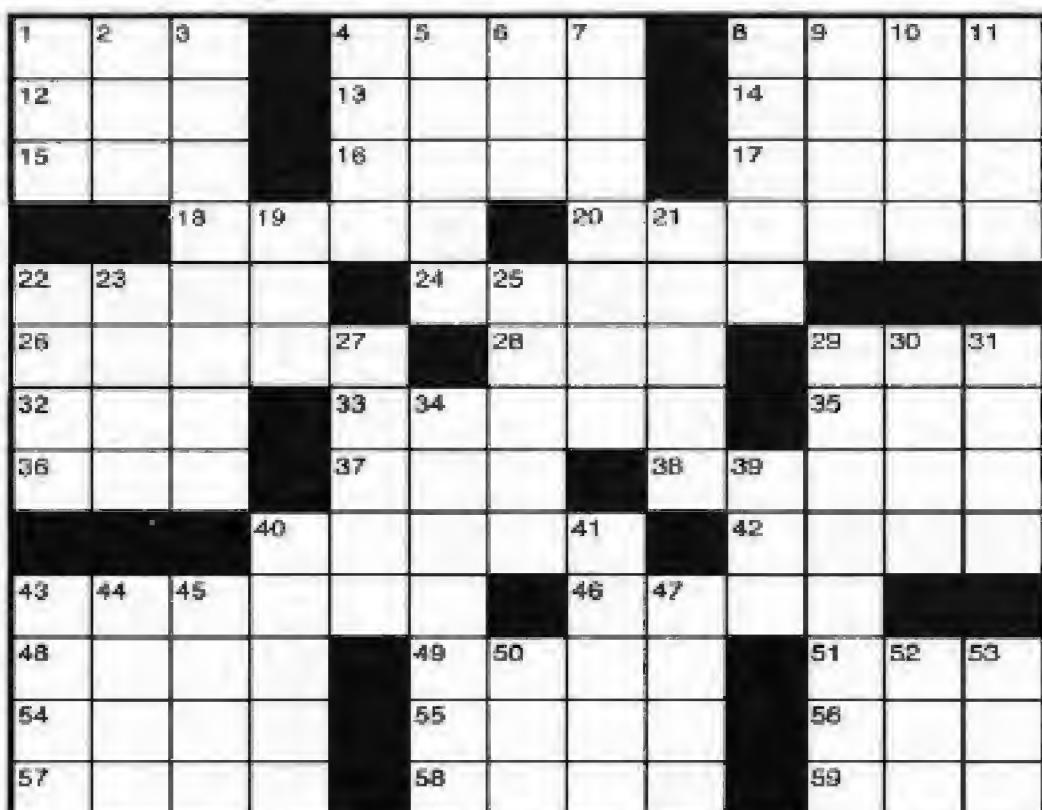
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ACROSS

- ACROSS**

 1. Crowd's cheer
 4. Recipe abbr.
 8. Football player's protection
 12. "This ___ recording" (2 wds.)
 13. Tresses
 14. "Exodus" author
 15. "Moonlight ___"
 16. VIP's staffer
 17. Public violence
 18. Howl
 20. Exonerates
 22. Helen of ___
 24. Scornful smile
 26. Sultan's wives
 28. Poem of praise
 29. British fliers' gp.
 32. Ottawa's prov.
 33. Supply refreshments
 35. Barely get by
 36. Cry of disgust
 37. Lifesaving skill (abbr.)
 38. "If You Knew ___"
 40. Expressed disapproval
 42. Faxed
 43. "Dancing with the Stars"



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|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| winner Burke | 3. Rita of film | forte |
| 46. Perlman of
"Cheers" | 4. Native of
Bangkok | 30. Similar |
| 48. Play character | 5. Dips out water | 31. Leg |
| 49. Sheriff Taylor's
boy | 6. Funnyman
Caesar | extremities |
| 51. Tachometer
letters | 7. Go before | 34. Expression of
regret |
| 54. "It was __
dream" (2
wds.) | 8. More refined | 39. Employment |
| 55. River of
Arizona | 9. Diva's solo | 40. Crack |
| 56. Talk lovingly | 10. Fashion
design name | 41. Carpenter's
need |
| 57. Humble | 11. Fast jets
(abbr.) | 43. Prepare for
finals |
| 58. Scream | 19. Positive vote | 44. Puncture |
| 59. Laughing
sound | 21. Ogles | 45. Parisian |
| DOWN | 22. You, once | pronoun |
| 1. Leaf's vein | 23. Went "ding-
dong" | 47. Make well |
| 2. Thin __ rail (2
wds.) | 25. __ Dame
University | 50. Key lime __ |
| | 27. "Star Trek"
doctor | 52. Edgar Allan |
| | 29. Scientist's | — |
| | | 53. Stooge with
bangs |

DOWN

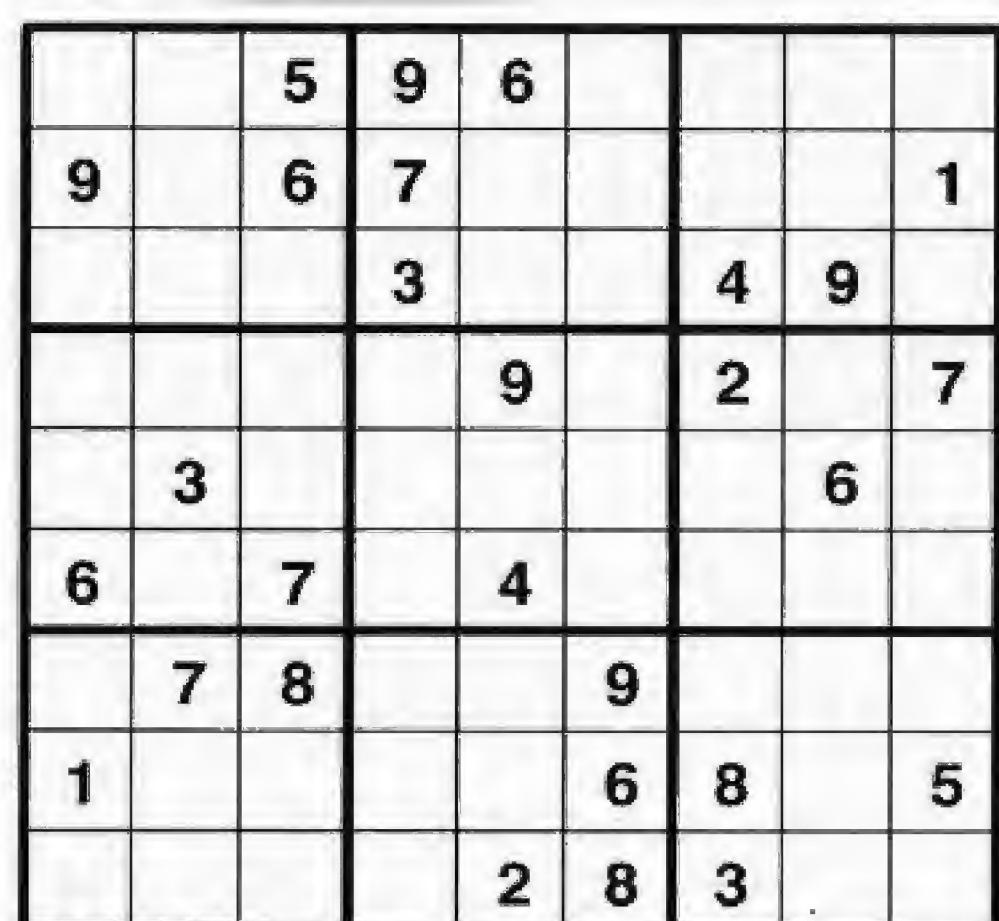
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| 1. Leaf's vein | 27. "Star Trek" | 33. Stodge with
bangs |
| 2. Thin ___ rail (2
wds.) | doctor | |
| | 29. Scientist's | |

SOLUTION



Complete the grid so that every row and every column contains the numbers 1 through 9
A number is Never repeated in a row or column.
In addition every rectangle must contain the numbers 1 through 9

Sudoku



SOLUTION

Complete the grid so that every row and every column contains the numbers 1 through 9
A number is Never repeated in a row or column.
In addition every rectangle must contain the numbers 1 through 9

O Condominiums

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Aruba's most successful developers of secure, superior communities for both the permanent and part time resident market, will soon break ground on what they consider their most exclusive project to date. Known for 16 years of unmatched quality and service, the Cas Bon people are proud to unveil their new pet

project: O Condominiums. This is the same company which developed the innovative Gold Coast Villas community in Malmok.

Renowned for reliable construction, developers of O Condominiums consider the boutique community will be the "jewel in the crown" of the nine projects they have successfully completed and

maintain. It is only three stories and twenty luxurious units, of which 14 will be oceanfront, the remainder, ocean view. Sizes range from one bedroom condominiums with a bath and a half to three-bedrooms, each bedroom with its own bath, and an additional guest half bath. The designs include a family entertainment room that will

be specially fitted with electronic and Internet connections and outlets enabling a state-of-the-art-home theater. An important aspect of this singular facility is owners have various options to customize kitchens and fixtures to their particular tastes and standards.

Each apartment sports an extremely spacious 35 square meter covered terrace overlooking the sea. Windows will be double-paned and doors

have weather stripping to insure less cost on air-conditioning, which is integrated into construction. Homeowners will have input into the finishing they prefer in the kitchen and other rooms, to customize your condominium to your taste. Public amenities will include an elegant pool deck, concierge

services, lounge area, BBQ station, fitness room, assigned parking, additional outside storage for bicycles and personal items, and 24-hour security. A quiet, secluded section of Eagle beach is only a few steps from the front door.

O Condominiums officially opened the doors of their sales office onsite at Eagle Beach on December 24. Interested parties can inspect the project in a spacious plot right next to the gourmet Screaming Eagle restaurant. The project is directed towards discerning clients seeking a top quality property on Aruba in an ideal, tranquil, beachfront location.

Prospective property owners will find the Cas Bon people enjoy an exceptional reputation on Aruba for excellence and reliability.

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Enjoy a true taste of Aruba without having to travel in the charming surroundings of The Queen's Restaurant in the Palm Beach Plaza Mall. Your host, Varella Innocencia has brought her very popular Oranjestad eatery to Palm Beach, showcasing authentic local cuisine only a short walk away from the major resorts.

The "hipper" and elegant new digs offer beautiful views, but Mama Luisa's magical touch in the kitchen is what



first won this charming eatery their loyal clientele. She can be counted on to be conjuring up the delicious dishes that have been in her family for generations. As Varella says, "My mom loves and lives to cook. Even when she is not at work in the restaurant, she is experimenting with new dishes all day at home."

She is the Queen of the Kitchen."

Be sure to try Luisa's acclaimed "Carni Stoba di Ma-



Mama Luisa hard at work in the kitchen

tion of banana hasa and creamy potatoes provide a deliciously picturesque meal.

The Queen's is located on the second level of Palm Beach Plaza, tucked into a cozy corner at the front of the mall. If you have a mind to try the real deal in Aruban food, without a doubt, this is the way to go, reasonably priced and easily accessible. A full menu can be seen on their website, <http://www.thequeensaruba.com/>.

Aside from an extensive regular menu they also have daily specials made from whatever is in season, and Mama Luisa is in the mood to prepare, so don't be shy about asking for something that may not be on the menu, as they are always eager to please.

The Queen's is open daily from 3:00 pm - 11:00 pm, offering both indoor and outdoor dining.

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NBA: Durant nets 35 points to lead Thunder triumph

CLEVELAND (AFP) - NBA scoring leader Kevin Durant had 35 points, 11 rebounds and six assists Thursday to power the Oklahoma City Thunder over host Cleveland 102-95.

Spaniard Serge Ibaka contributed 16 points and 11 rebounds while Reggie Jackson added 13 points and six assists in Oklahoma City's fourth win in five games.

Thunder star guard Russell Westbrook did not play in order to rest his right knee just one month after returning from surgery that had sidelined him for almost two months.

Dion Waiters scored 30 points to lead Cleveland, which lost for the third game in a row and seventh time in nine starts. Spencer Hawes added 20 points for Cleveland.



The Thunder improved to 50-18, matching Indiana for the second-best record in the NBA behind San Antonio.

The Cavaliers, who trailed by as many as 21 in the fourth quarter, made a 16-2 run to pull within 97-92 with 72 seconds remaining.

But Durant sank four late free throws to seal Cleve-

land's fate.

At 26-43, the Cavaliers are 6.5 games behind Atlanta for the last Eastern Conference playoff spot.

Oklahoma City connected on 38-of-89 shots from the floor and outrebounded the Cavaliers 53-36, although they surrendered 24 points off 18 turnovers.

Briefs:



TENNIS:- MIAMI (AFP) - Roger Federer began his campaign at the WTA and ATP Miami Masters on Friday with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) defeat of Ivo Karlovic. The fifth-seeded Swiss, now 11-1 all-time against the Croatian, was impeccable in the opening set, losing his only point on serve as he stood 5-4, 40-0 moments before serving out the opener. A winning tie-break in the second finally made the difference for Federer, now 42-12 in Miami with titles in 2005 and 2006. Federer missed the tournament a year ago as he rested with back pain but has turned his 2014 season around after a low-key 2013. Last weekend's finalist at Indian Wells withstood 13 aces from the big-hitting Croatian in Friday's 74-minute win.



Motorcycling:- DOHA (AFP) - Spain's Aleix Espargaro completed a clean-sweep of all three practice sessions for the season-opening Qatar Grand Prix while world champion Marc Marquez emerged as the fastest of the MotoGP title favourites. Espargaro clocked 1min 54.773sec in Friday's second session after also topping the time charts earlier in the day as well as on Thursday ahead of Sunday's race under the desert floodlights at Losail. Italy's Ducati rider Andrea Iannone was second overall at 0.413sec off the pace with Honda's Alvaro Bautista in third and Andrea Dovizioso, on another Ducati, in fourth spot.



NFL: ALAMEDA -- The Raiders have found their quarterback, reaching an agreement Friday to acquire Houston's Matt Schaub for a late-round draft pick. ESPN first reported the trade. Schaub, 32, is a two-time Pro Bowl quarterback who struggled for the Texans last season, losing his job to Case Keenum. Houston, which signed free-agent quarterback Ryan Fitzpatrick Thursday, had no intention of retaining Schaub, who carries a \$10 million salary in 2014.

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Looking back at the Chile 2014 South American Games



ORANJESTAD - Last Tuesday evening delegates of the 14 participating countries met for the historic closing ceremonies at Plaza de la Moneda, Chile of the 2014 South American Games. In the presence of a gigantic public,

recently elected President of Chile, Michele Bachelet led the closing ceremony.

Organizers thanked the city of Santiago, Chile for their hospitality during the long two weeks. More than a half a million people visited the

games and supported the numerous athletes in their different sports.

Each delegation has already began preparing for the next South American Games to be played in four years, 2018 which is scheduled to take place in the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia. This was the reason the Mayor of Cochabamba took the flag of the ODESUR Games.

As for the Aruban delegation, they now look back with great satisfaction at the South American games. Stuart Smit achieved a Bronze medal, giving Aruba still another milestone in international competitions at such a high level.

The Aruba delegation returns fully charged to focus now on the Festival Olympia, Youth Olympic Games, Juegos de Playa and the Central American of the Caribbean Games.

All power to our Aruban delegation for the future championships on the horizon; you did great in Chile!

Looking forward to 2014 Landscape Basketball Championship results



ORANJESTAD - Last Monday March 10th, employees of the Landscaping of Flora Market, Divi Village, Marriott Hotel and Caribbean Drip Irrigation began their annual championship games. Family and friends gathered to watch and lend their support to the participants of this year's championship games.

The championship games will end on March 28th with a final playoff between two teams. On Monday, March 10th the Divi Village played against Marriott Hotel with Divi Village winning with 27-0.

The second game played was between Flora Market and Caribbean Drip Irrigation with the later winning Flora Market 32-11.

On Wednesday March 12th, Divi Village won Caribbean Drip Irrigation 198-13, while Flora Market won Marriott 30-10. On Friday, March 14th Caribbean Drip Irrigation won Marriott 32-26, while Flora Market

won Divi Village 24-21.

On Wednesday March 19th Caribbean Drip Irrigation won Flora Market 28-25 and Div Village won Marriott 44-17.

The next game is scheduled for Friday, March 21st between Marriott Hotel and Flora Market and Caribbean Drip Irrigation and Divi Village. The final game will be played on March 28th at the Centro di Bario Brazil beginning at 8:00pm. Two teams will be playing for first place winners. Referees of all these games are Andy Young, Richenella Richardson and Glennon Eights. Carmen Loefstop was at the table registering everything on paper.

The teams are appealing to all their clients and fans to come out and support them on March 28th. Come and see Basketball played at its all time best and see who will take home the Landscape Basketball Championship Cup for 2014.

Football: PSG players set for million euro bonus for winning C1

PARIS (AFP) - Paris Saint-Germain players are in line for a record million euro bonus (£833,000, \$1.38m) should they go on and win the Champions League for the first time this season, French media revealed.

According to sports daily L'Equipe, the highest bonuses in football history are set to be handed out to the Ligue 1 leaders as reward from their cash-laden Qatari owners, QSI (Qatar Sports Investments), for reaching and winning the May 24 final in Lisbon.

The paper said that it was top scorer Zlatan Ibrahimovic who negotiated the package with club president Nasser Al-Khelaifi, with whom he has a strong relationship.

The previous highest bonuses handed out were in the region of 800,000 euros (£667,000, \$1.1m) that Bayern Munich players pocketed for their Champions League triumph last season as well as winning the German title and German Cup.

Real Madrid players are in line to pick up a paltry 500,000 euros (£417,000, \$688,000) in comparison should the Spanish giants go on and win a record extending 10th European Cup.

Laurent Blanc's PSG side are eight points clear in Ligue 1 and also set to play in the French League Cup final against Lyon on April 19.

Football: United lose Van Persie for up to six weeks

LONDON (AFP) - Manchester United's underwhelming season received yet another setback on Friday with the news that striker Robin van Persie will be out for four to six weeks with a sprained knee.

The Dutchman sustained the injury after scoring a hat-trick against Olympiakos in the Champions League on Wednesday and news of the blow fell hours after United were paired with Bayern Munich in the quarter-finals.

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points behind leaders Chelsea in the Premier League, 12 points below the top four, and have been eliminated from both domestic cup competitions.

Van Persie, 30, stands to miss both legs of the tie against the defending champions and will only be able to feature in two or three of United's final Premier League games if he is sidelined for the full six weeks.

The news arrives at an unwelcome juncture for United manager David Moyes, who had expressed hope that the 3-0 victory over Olympiakos would prove a turning point in a wretched season.

United are currently 18

Van Persie was stretchered off after taking a blow to the back of his knee during the mid-week game at Old Trafford, but Moyes initially played down the extent of his injury, saying it was "hopefully not too bad".

Van Persie was United's top scorer last season, scoring 30 goals in all competitions as the club romped to the Premier League title in his first campaign since arriving from Arsenal.